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ABSTRACT

The Teachers as Readers Project, originally developed by the American Association of Publishers, helps teachers encourage students to become lifelong readers. Teachers as Readers Book Groups consist of teachers and librarians who meet on a regular basis to read and discuss the same literature--at least four quality children's or adolescents' books and one professional book. To form a book group, first choose approximately 10 members, one of whom should be a school administrator. As an option, consider inviting parents, community members, or school board members to participate. A meeting place and time, six or more meeting dates, group leaders or discussion facilitators, and reading material are among the things that should be selected when organizing the group. Some groups seek funding for reading materials. Local school districts, parent-teacher organizations, and Writing Project groups are among possible sources. Among the suggestions for group facilitators are: establish a relaxed and positive environment; read and reread the book to be discussed; and make a list of four or five open-ended discussion questions. (CR)

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Teaching Ideas and Topics

Teachers as Readers: Forming Book Groups for Professionals

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"The most successful aspect has been the opportunity to interact with other teachers, to hear different perspectives, and to function more as a group of learners than teachers."

What are Book Groups?

The Teachers as Readers Project, originally developed by the American Association of Publishers, helps teachers encourage students to become lifelong readers. When teachers read and enjoy quality literature with confidence, they contribute to the rich, literate environment of classrooms.

Teachers as Readers Book Groups consist of

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teachers and librarians who:

- meet on a regular basis to read and discuss the same literature.
- select at least four quality children's or adolescents' books and one professional book to read and discuss.

"We read the books, came together informally before school once a month and shared/discussed what we'd read. In so doing, not only was our collective understanding enhanced, but we also came to know one another better as individuals. All in all, the sessions have been a very positive experience. The only 'negative' was that often we ran out of time before we'd said all we wanted to say."

Why Should Teachers Form Book Groups?

- Explore your own literacy.
- Share quality literature with colleagues.
- Model lifelong reading pleasure.
- Gain experience and confidence with book discussion.
- Reflect upon and learn from personal experience with books.
- Enhance teaching and learning.

"This group has helped its members find a forum where all thoughts and opinions were welcomed and respected. It also helped the participants come to know each other better. These new relationships have carried over into other areas of the educational program."

How to Form Book Groups:

- Organize a group of approximately ten members, one of whom should be a school administrator. As an option, consider inviting parents, community members, or

school board members to participate.

- Determine six or more meeting dates.
- Establish a regular meeting place and time.
- Select group leaders or discussion facilitators.
- Determine reading material.
- Talk to group members for suggestions.
- Study current book review sources.
- Check recommended reading lists found in Language Arts, English Journal, and The ALAN Review. (For information about these journals, contact NCTE at 1/800-369-6283.)

How to Fund Book Groups:

Some book groups seek funding for reading materials. Begin by contacting local school districts, parent-teacher organizations, local Writing Project groups, local TAWL groups, and the local affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English. Explore possible partnerships with local businesses and industries; prepare a simple grant proposal before talking or meeting with them. If outside funding is not available, use books currently in schools or public libraries. In any event, don't let financial concerns stop you from reading widely and well.

"I really found I could read for enjoyment during the school year. It was great!"

Tips for Book Group Facilitators

- Establish a relaxed, positive environment. This is a literacy adventure which is meant to be fun and rewarding on a personal as well as professional level.
- Read and reread the book to be discussed.
- Make mental notes (Post-Its help) of four

to five open-ended discussion questions; use these only as necessary to restart conversation or to steer conversation back to the book.

- Value personal experiences and multiple interpretations growing out of those experiences.
- Welcome and encourage dissension . . . Lively, interesting discussions result.
- Occasionally, ask someone to bring information about the author, another book by the same author, or reviews about the book.
- Eliminate guilt. Not finishing a book isn't a crime.
- Schedule a separate session for talking about teaching techniques and student connections. (Or reserve the last few minutes of each session.)
- Encourage tentative voices. The less talkative members of the group need opportunities to join in the conversation.
- Be a good listener; let conversation develop.
- Don't be afraid of silences.
- Sit back and enjoy the experience.

"The most successful aspect has been the opportunity to interact with other teachers, to hear different perspectives, and to function more as a group of learners than teachers."

"The group has been a great means of getting new books into the hands of teachers and students."

"I am a teacher of younger students, but I particularly enjoyed reading literature aimed at older children and meeting with upper-grade teachers. This experience gave me a broader perspective of the type of reading my students will

encounter later."

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